

## What Happens to Children Who Die?

July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Pastoral prayer:

Ganstrom 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary back on June 20<sup>th</sup>

Our nation

5 Day clubs

Intro –

Not a small question

Sad reality is that hundreds of millions or perhaps billions of unborn babies, newborns, and young children have died.

Roughly 25% of conceptions end in miscarriage before the 20 week mark.

1 in 4 women have had a miscarriage.

According to the World Health Organization, 1 million newborns die within 24 hours of birth. Add in those that die during labor or during the first month, and 2.9 million lives are lost.

Those rates are not evenly dispersed of course as rates are much higher in underdeveloped countries with poorer healthcare systems.

While child mortality rates are falling globally, they are still incredibly high.

Additionally, just under 1 million abortions occur every year in the US.

The sheer numbers make this a pressing question as we talk about death, dying, and what happens next.

It's an emotionally loaded question because for many this is not a theoretical abstraction.

Many have lost a child through miscarriage or while they were young and they want to know, where is my baby?

It's also a question that strikes at the issue of God's goodness and justice for many.

Even if you have never lost a child, you may wonder about the goodness, justice, or fairness of God because of childhood mortality, especially if you wonder if these children that pass away spend eternity in torment after their brief earthly existence.

I think we can confidently say, "your baby is in heaven. Your baby is safe in the arms of God."

Is it "sentimentally necessary" to say that a child who dies is with Jesus but lacking real evidence?

Does it rest on speculation or hope?

Or do we *know* this from scripture?

An excellent book on this topic is *Safe in the Arms of God* by John MacArthur. Influential in my study and I'll quote from it several times this morning.

It's wonderfully pastoral and gentle while being biblically robust, so I would encourage anyone with nagging questions or pain from this topic to pick up a copy.

1. God **personally** created and knows every person who is conceived. (Psalm 139)

The rich content in this loaded psalm is true of every person, included those who die very young, those whose lives seem so short, even those whose lives don't extend beyond the womb.

They matter to God. Their lives had significance, no matter how brief. There are no meaningless lives. There are no irrelevant lives.

This passage doesn't address the question of what happens when a child dies – are they in heaven? But it assures us that their lives had meaning, significance, and were known by God, even if their days were brief.

**Psalms 139:17-18** How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! <sup>18</sup> If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

God's thoughts are vast and precious.

6 powerful truths about the personhood of every child conceived (MacArthur)

- a. God knows everything about **you** (vv. 1-4)
    - i. He knows all about you – what you will do, where you will go. All your personality traits (your ways), your words.
    - ii. This is also true of the smallest infant. God completely knows them.
      1. Parents know the experience of cuddling a little baby and wondering what they will be like as they grow – will they be loud or reserved, athletic, thoughtful, gentle, courageous; what they will look like. Some of those are choices and influenced by environment, others appeal to be built in to the genetic code.
      2. The Lord fully knows all this about every life, including those who die very young.
  - b. God is actively **involved** in your life (vv. 5-6)
    - i. He is no passive observer. He encloses you behind and before and lays his hand upon your life.
    - ii. Friends, cling to this if you find yourself fearful in these days.
    - iii. That is also true of the briefest life.
  - c. God will never **cease** to have knowledge of you (vv. 7-10)
    - i. There is no where you can go where God is not.
    - ii. MacArthur – He will never forget, overlook, or lose sight of anyone.
  - d. God is never **limited** in His understanding (vv. 11-12)
    - i. Night and day, darkness and light are both alike to Him. There is no darkness so dark that you are hidden or unknown by Him. That's true of your child, whether tucked away in her mother's womb or separated from you in the NICU.
    - ii. MacArthur – God knew as much about you in the first few moments after your conception as He knows about you today.
  - e. God is your personal **creator** (vv. 13-15)
    - i. Your child may have your nose or your husband's eyes, but you didn't create him. The Lord did, weaving together the double helix of his genetic code to create just who He intended to create.
  - f. God personally **planned** your destiny (v. 16)
    - i. A passage we have come back to many times in this series – He ordained all your days before there was even one. For some, that might be 30,000 days. For one million newborns globally, that might be only one day. But the significance of life is not determined by its length but by the one who made it.
2. God shows special care for **children**.

- a. **Ezekiel 16:20-21** "Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? <sup>21</sup> "You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through *the fire*.
    - i. All babies are "owned" by God – God lays full claim to these innocent sons and daughters who are sacrificed to false gods. (mac)
  - b. **Matthew 18:3-5** and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;
  - c. **Mark 10:14-16** But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." <sup>16</sup> And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.
    - i. We often see Jesus using children as object lessons as well as simply showing them care and affection.
3. David was confident he would go to his infant son who passed away.
- a. **2 Samuel 12:23** "But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."
    - i. David fasted and prayed while his child was sick but when he died he expressed a confidence that he would be with him again.
  - b. Will my child know me in heaven?
    - i. David says I will go to *him*. Not just to heaven where he is but to *him*.
4. Job believed an infant who died was at rest.
- a. **Job 3:11-19** "Why did I not die at birth, Come forth from the womb and expire? <sup>12</sup> "Why did the knees receive me, And why the breasts, that I should suck? <sup>13</sup> "For now I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest, <sup>14</sup> With kings and *with* counselors of the earth, Who rebuilt ruins for themselves; <sup>15</sup> Or with princes who had gold, Who were filling their houses *with* silver. <sup>16</sup> "Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be, As infants that never saw light. <sup>17</sup> "There the wicked cease from raging, And there the weary are at rest. <sup>18</sup> "The prisoners are at ease together; They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster. <sup>19</sup> "The small and the great are there, And the slave is free from his master.
    - i. Is this merely describing Job's preference that he would rather never have been born than go through the suffering he endured? No, it's more specific. Notice what he affirms about an infant that never saw the light.
    - ii. Job describes paradise for a child who dies. It's the place where the formerly weary and captive are at rest.
    - iii. Mac - Job understood that dying as an infant would bring one to rest and one would escape the pain of suffering. He certainly didn't believe that infants that die go to hell and some eternal torment but rather had the confidence that they entered into rest.
5. At the Great White Throne judgment people are held accountable for their own sinful actions.
- a. We are sinners by nature and standing before we are sinners by choice.
    - i. **Psalm 143:2b** For in Your sight no man living is righteous.
    - ii. **Ephesians 2:3** Among them we too all . . . were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.
    - iii. **Genesis 8:21b** the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth;

1. None of us is righteous because we are born with a sinful nature that expresses itself in sinful actions, attitudes, suppression of truth, and unbelief.
  2. This is why we desperately need an alien righteousness, a righteousness that comes from outside ourselves.
- iv. **Psalm 51:5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.
  - v. **Romans 5:19** For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.
    1. We also have a sinful standing as we are considered guilty in Adam with the entire human race. His sin was imputed (credited) to us just as Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us through faith.
  - vi. It is for this reason that we need a second birth, a new birth.
- b. Salvation is always by grace through the one mediator, Jesus Christ.
- i. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.
  - ii. Ordinarily it is necessary to repent and believe in Christ to be saved. That is man's response to the hidden work of the heart that the Lord does as He draws those who believe. And yet for those who are too young to understand and believe, it appears that God extends His grace and covers the inherited guilt.
  - iii. I think this is a reasonable conclusion based on the judgment passage in scripture.
- c. Judgment passages focus on personal sin.
- i. **Revelation 20:11-13** Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds . . . they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.
  - ii. **Galatians 5:19-21** Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
  - iii. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.
  - iv. **Colossians 3:6** For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,
  - v. **Revelation 21:8** "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."
  - vi. MacArthur: "Scripture always connects eternal condemnation with works of unrighteousness – willful sin."
  - vii. A baby has not suppressed the truth, violated their conscience (the law of God written on their heart from Rom. 2), denied their creator in unbelief.

viii. It is in this qualified sense that they are “innocent.”

1. **Psalm 106:38** And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and their daughters,  
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with the blood.

d. Is there an age of accountability?

- i. Some people are described as not knowing the difference between left and right, evil and good.
- ii. **Jonah 4:11** "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"
- iii. **Deuteronomy 1:39** 'Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it.

1. Mac – the Israelite children of sinful parents were allowed to enter fully into the blessing God had for His people. They were in no way held accountable, responsible, or punishable for the sins of their parents. Why? Because they had no knowledge of good and evil, right or wrong.

iv. **John 9:41** Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

1. John Piper: The point for us is that even though we human beings are under the penalty of everlasting judgment and death because of the fall of our race into sin and the sinful nature that we all have, nevertheless God only executes this judgment on those who have the natural capacity to see his glory and understand his will, and refuse to embrace it as their treasure. Infants, I believe, do not yet have that capacity; and therefore, in God's inscrutable way, he brings them under the forgiving blood of his Son.

v. Better to describe it as a condition of accountability. There is no one definitive age that on their birthday someone automatically becomes accountable for their sin and unbelief. Some with developmental disabilities may never have the capacity to understand the facts of the gospel and respond.

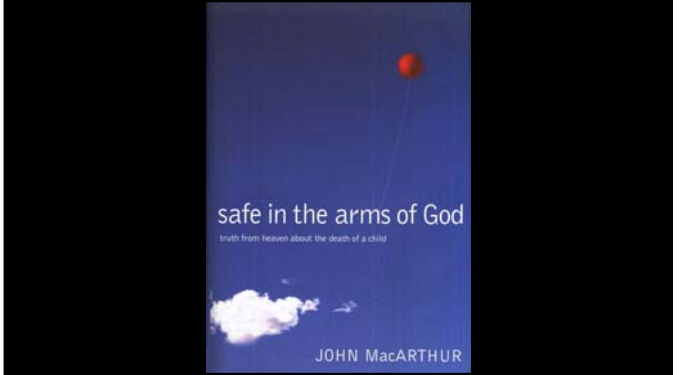
6. We can trust God to do good because He is good.

- a. **Psalm 119:68a** You are good and do good;
- b. **Genesis 18:25b** Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"
- c. Even if someone is unpersuaded by the chain of passages we looked at today, we can rest in God's goodness and justice. In the end He will do what is good and just.



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1



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truth from heaven about the death of a child

JOHN MacARTHUR

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